

The economy brightens, but coin sales dull

By Roger Boye

Despite a reviving economy, the rare-coin business in northern Illinois continues to languish, judging from reports made by seven of eight dealers interviewed earlier this month.

"Our sales have picked up a bit from one year ago," said Richard Castelli of Ace Coin and Stamp Mart, 134 N. Wells St., "but the small, everyday collector still has not returned."

Prices for most collectible coins peaked in early 1980, nearly in unison with the record-setting silver and gold markets. As the precious metals slid in value, so did most old coins, with some rarities losing 40 percent or more of their retail value in two years.

Although coin prices have recovered a little since mid-1982, some dealers blame their recent slow sales on the "typical summer doldrums." Others point to lingering effects of the recession.

"Illinois has suffered—and still is suffering—much more than most states," said a dealer who asked not to be identified. "The more unemployment, the fewer keepsakes I sell."

Even Chicago's largest coin stores have not escaped the sub-par market. Over-the-counter sales at the Rare Coin Company of America [RARCOA] remain sluggish, although staffers noted heightened interest in the company's mail-bid auction, said James McNamara, a professional numismatist at the store.

RARCOA, 31 N. Clark St., was one of four U.S. coin firms conducting a huge New York auction in late July. The 2,000-lot sale grossed an average of roughly \$3,500 per coin, indicating that wealthy collectors and dealers are buying high-ticket items.

The only Chicago coin shop reporting healthy local business was Jake's Marketplace Inc., 2955 N. Central Ave., a company that sells coins through the mail as well as over-the-counter.

"We've got 14 people on the staff, and we're busy most of the time," said president Robert H. Jacobs, a coin dealer for 20 years. He credits his good fortune to advertising and "catering to the average guy."

More typical, however, are dealers like Marty Daru of Daru Coins, Stamps and Supplies, 6455 W. Archer Ave. He said he is visited by more would-be coin collectors than buyers, with some people wanting to liquidate their collections to pay bills.

Coins that are moving at present include silver dollars in the better condition categories, U.S. gold coins minted before 1933 and commemorative half dollars, according to some of the dealers. Others say that key-date coins in low-denomination series—such as the 1909-S VDB Lincoln cent—are particularly poor sellers.